

⁵⁰ [The immigration of Mr. Ragavan to South Africa]

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PROJECT

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Mr. Ragavan in 1912. Picture taken in Braemar.

The text is based on this man; his arrival in South Africa, his life in South Africa and his death, and his descendant Mr. Naik.

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INTRODUCTION

The arrival of the S.S TRURO on Friday November 16, 1860 in Port Natal marked the arrival of the Indians in Natal, South Africa. Since that first landing, " a community of nearly half a million law abiding Indians has emerged and behind the graphic glimpses of the past lie their determination to rise above the Economic and Political limitations." ¹

Today due to their own initiative and enterprise, tremendous strides have been made in the fields of commerce, industry and farming with reference to the sugar industry for which purpose the Indians skill and resourcefulness was recognized as being particularly suited for this field of progress. Following upon the first labour force which arrived in the country, came Indian craftsman and merchants. These came mainly as free passengers and were not affected by the indentured system. Many of the Indian community have entered professions and are serving their own people. They constitute a vital part of the South African community.

Some eighteen years after the first arrival of Indians into Natal on 12 September 1878 the barque VIMERIA I, brought yet another load of Indians, numbering 471. One of which was my great grandfather Mr. Ragavan; Ragavan being his first name and Veersamy being his father's name. As was common at that time the family name "Naicker" was not in any documents made of them.

PLACE OF ORIGIN IN INDIA

Mr Ragavan Veersamy lived in Chingleput, South India. This district lay on the east coast of the Madras Presidency, lying between 12 degrees and 24 latitude and 13 degrees and 47 latitude North and 79 degrees and 34 latitude and 80 degrees and 21 latitude East with an area of 3079 square miles. It encloses Madras city and the capital of the province. The land is flat and is situated near the sea.

Census taken in 1901 showed that Chingleput consisted of 436 square miles, tw. towns, 298 villages with a population of 155313. The distributions of this population is 356 per square mile. 13092 of these people were able to read and write. In 1871 there were 938181 people in Chingleput, of these 9690 were Hindus and the rest were Musalians and Christians. Chingleput was the smallest district in Chingleput.

REASONS FOR LEAVING ORIGINAL COUNTRY

According to literature available at that time, many of the people of Chingleput received their main source of revenue from farming of Chingleput received their main source of revenue from farming. The month of September is the busiest period, during which time sowing and planting of crops take place. During the rest of the year the inhabitants resorted to fishing and cotton and silk weaving.

Chingleput Chingleput suffered four times in the eighteenth century. In 1733 this was due to general neglect of its irrigation works, in 1780 there was an invasion into Chingleput that left many homeless. In 1785 a great cyclone damaged tanks and channels. In 1787 there was wide spread drought. Drought and famine attacked Chingleput five times in the year last century, these were in the years 1807, 1824, 1833, 1876-8. The farming of 1876 to 1878 is of particularly importance in that it can be seen as one of the reasons for immigration to South Africa.

Statistics of the period during Mr. Veersamy lived in India showed that the place was immensely populated about 356 people occupied one square mile. This can be seen as another reason for this immigration to South Africa.

I have ruled out the probability of caste being one of the reasons for immigration to this Country with regard to this particularly individual Mr. Veersamy belonging to the Vannia caste. According to Mr. E. Thurston the "Vannians are oil presses among the tamils, corresponding to the Telegu Ganglas. Due to their service of lighting the temples they earn a high position and some of them use the title of "Joti Nagarattar" i.e. dwellers in the city of light or dwellers in the city of holy lamps." ²

Thus Mr. Veersamy escaped the taunting humiliations of being born into a low caste. The caste system did however prohibit all forms of social mobility and was thus an inevitable condition.

DATES OF DEPARTURE AND ARRIVAL IN SOUTH AFRICA.

He sailed on board the Vimeria I together with 470 other indentured passengers. Natal laws I3, I4, I5 empowered the government of Natal to introduce indentured labour under conditions similar to those applicable in Mauritius. The conditions stipulated that immigrants were to be indentured for a period of five years. Two of which was to be cancelled by a payment of £1,50 (250 cents) per year by the labourer. The Vimeria I left Madras and arrived in Port Natal in 12 September 1878. There were two deaths on ship and one birth. Thus completing a Thirty four day trip.

FIRST PLACE OF SETTLEMENT AND FIRST OCCUPATION.

On arrival in South Africa he was allocated to Mr. G.T. Smith. Mr. Smith owned a farm in Ifafa, Umzinto. This farm later changed hands to Mr. Cole under whom Mr. Ragavan spent most of his indentured service. Mr. Cole grew mealies, beans and tobacco. The soil was poor and the farm ran at a loss. At the end of his indentured period he was given five acres of land in Braemar, a district close to Ifafa.

SUBSEQUENT PLACES OF SETTLEMENT AND OCCUPATION.

Changes in the terms of indenture at the end of this period provided in the act of 1891 stipulated that at the end of the indentured period the labourer was required to reside in the colony for another five years before he was entitled to return to India. It was during this time that most would re-indenture. The many grievances of indentured labour at this time was further highlighted by the arrival of Ghandi and the passive Resistance movement in South Africa.

The basic problem at this time was that since many Indians were free and chose to stand on their own, they posed a threat to the colonists. The majority preferred to settle in the country and develop on their own. It showed once again their desire for self expansion and innovation. It should be remembered that "the indentured Indian came in the main as isolated individuals without kin or capital and each man started his own household, supporting his wife and children on his individual earning"³. Many people chose to take land in exchange of a free passage back to India. Many began farming, gardening, hawking etc. About Two thousand Indians occupied land within 2 miles of Durban. These Holdings ranged from 3 to approximately 25 acres in size. Because land became available to many Indians "by 1900 Approximately 14000 acres of land belonged to Indians in the Verulam and Tongaat areas"⁴. Other areas in which Indians acquired land were in Wetteireden, Stanger, Compensation and Doornklop. Mr. Veersamy at the end of his period acquired a small piece of land in Braemar near Umzinto. Here he planted beans, mealies and tobacco.

It was during this period that Indians gained a monopoly of the fishing industry. They became suppliers of fruit and vegetables. Others found employment as artisans, cooks, domestic servants, tailors and laundry men. Others went into trade. In these ways they became economically integrated into the natal economy. "their Small numbers, their illiteracy and their poverty were their strength. The Europeans feared newcomers and were not prepared to accept or recognize them and did everything in their power to have them reindentured"⁵. The soil that they were given therefore, as in the case of Mr. Ragavan was hardly worth working on.

3. M. Palmer and others : The Indian as a South African , p 204

4. B. Pachai : The evolution of a Minority , p 455

OCCUPATIONS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN POPULATION

CENSUS (1916 - 1926) IN NATAL.

OCCUPATION	1916		1926	
	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
Fishing	122	-	55	-
Agriculture	16942	1079	11827	1387
Mining	569	-	296	3
Industry	12288	272	18953	581
Transport and communication	2323	2	3617	9
Commercial	6861	382	8385	385
Public Administration and Defence	144	3	289	3
Professional	843	123	1358	264
Personal Service	5340	965	4891	747
Indipendant	1095	233	1411	384

Subsequently " bought wattle from neighbouring farms and sold the timber at a profit to other inhabitants in the neighbourhood". In this way they were were able to make ends meet.

OTHER ACTIVITIES.

He was also chosen as one of the delegates from Natal region to meet the Minister of Agriculture. This was at the time when tobacco was to become controlled commodity. He, together with Mr. P. Pillay from Port Shepstone and Mr. R. C. Naidoo from Umkomaas went as delegates from the Natal region. They helped form The Natal Indian farmers Tobacco Cooperation.

THE LIFE OF MR. KISTNASAMY NAICK

Due to the number of strikes and floods in this period all carefully kept documents and photographs were unattainable. Mr. Ragaveam was traced through Mr. Kistnasamy Naik's pass documents. Of great interest however was photographs available of Mr. Naiks activity in the Laundry Strikes of 1945. Mr Naik joined the laundry in 1931 where he worked until one week before Christmas 1945. He helped form the laundry Workers Union. The grievances for going on the strike were for shorter hours of work and more pay. It was during this period that South Africa was experiencing a black out i.e. a period during the second world war when all lights had to be sheild by a black cloth. The reason for demanding shorter hours was that many of the workers were attacked during these black out periods on their way home. The strikers held protest marches through the Durban esplanade and set ot their own laundry in Somstue Road. Due to hard conditions at the time and the economic conditions at the time and the economic conditions the strike stizzeled and many people were either jobless or returned to their last job.

Mr. Naik therefore was without employment until he found work with the Natal Guardian. Here he worked as office Manager. During this time he was also a representative of the Clairwood residence in the Natal Indian Congress, where he worked with Fatime Meer, Dr Dado, Dr Naicker and other prominent members. When the Guardian closed down Mr. Naik was forced to find other employment and had to give up political activities. At that time congress members were not welcome into industry. After leaving the Natal Indian Congress he found work with Hyne and Gibson where he worked for the past 30 years.



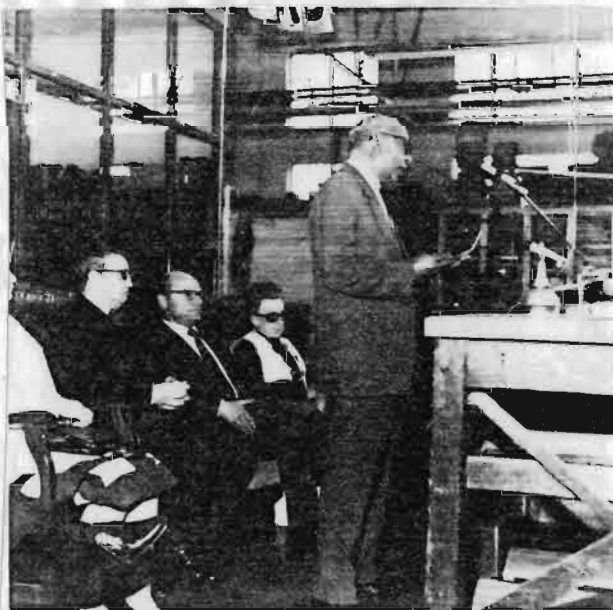
Gathering of strikers outside the laundry Premises in the 1945 strike.



Mr. Kistnasamy Naick , the descendant of Mr. Ragavan, seen here addressing a crowd in the 1945 Laundry workers strike.



Picture of the strikers protest march along the Durban Esplanade.
December 1945.



Mr. Kistnasamy Naick, seen here addressing a staff meeting during his employment as office Manager at The Natal Guardian.



Mr. Kistnasamy Naick, together with fellow colleagues and Management staff at the Guardian.



Mr. K. Naick presents Mr. Gibson (Chairman of Hayne and Gibson Ltd.) with a garland on behalf of the firm's Indian employees.

In conclusion, by this tribute to Mr. Ragavan and his descendant Mr. Naik, I hope that I ^{have} ~~done~~ ^{done} justice in presenting the lifestyle of a great man ^{who} ~~of~~ lived in an era that forms the grassroots of the Indian population today.

In highlighting the times and tribulations of the past it is evident that from time in memorial the Indians arise as a Nation that is progressive and able to remain victorious through the most stringent periods. Thus the Nation that stands today can be proud that they have arisen from such a remarkable and praise worthy foundation.

It is my fervent prayer that the generations that remain and those that follow would tread in our forefathers footsteps and uphold the tradition that has been passed down to us.

SOURCE DOCUMENTS

B.M.25

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRSCOPY OF SHIP'S LIST OF INDIAN IMMIGRANT

Serial Number	:	<u>62</u>
Colonial Number	:	<u>19751</u>
Date of Arrival	:	<u>12 - 9 - 1878</u>
Name of Ship	:	<u>VIMEIRA</u>
Place of Registration	:	<u> </u>
Date of Registration	:	<u> </u>
Number in Register	:	<u> </u>
Name	:	<u>RAGAVAN</u>
Father's Name	:	<u>VEERASAWMY</u>
Age	:	<u>34 YRS.</u>
Sex	:	<u>MALE</u>
Caste	:	<u>VANNIA</u>
District	:	<u>CHINGLEPUT</u>
Thanna/Taluq	:	<u>CONTEVERAM</u>
Village	:	<u>PALUNTHOOR</u>
Height	:	<u>5'7"</u>
Bodily Marks	:	<u>MOLE IN THE BACK</u>
Name of Next-of-Kin	:	<u>MOTHER - ALECMALOO</u>
Relations Accompanied	:	<u> </u>
Small Pox/Vaccinated	:	<u>VACCINATED</u>
Remarks	:	<u> </u>

Certified a true copy.



REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE

INLAND REVENUE.
BINNELANDSE INKOMSTE.

Revenue/Inkomste 193. (D.I. 117.)

UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA.

BIRTH REGISTER

UNIE VAN SUID-AFRIKA.

No. 2975

1916

Nº 53283

PASS TO INDIANS
PAS VIR INDIËRS



Born in the Province of Natal.
In die Provinsie Natal Gebore.

809245376A

This is to certify that
Hierby word gesertifiseer dat dit

KISTNASAMY NAICK

Colonial Born, is at liberty to dispose of.....HIS.....services.
in die Kolonie gebore, vrystaan om te verhuur.

Father's Name.....MUTHUSAMY
Naam van Vader

No. PASSR/19751
6196

Mother's Name.....V. SATHAMMA
Naam van Moeder

No. 73446

Sex.....MALE
Geslag

Age.....21 YEARS
Ouderdom

Height.....5' 7"
Lengte

Marks.....POCK MARK ON FOREHEAD
Merke



11 APRIL 1937
H. Johnson
Protecting Officer
Beskermer van Indiese Immigrante.

DOCUMENT USED TO TRACE MR. RAGAVAN.

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